

UNESCO Higher Education Activity Report for the Bologna Follow-up Group Meeting

November 2025

This report provides an overview of UNESCO's activities since February 2025 which are of relevance to the European Higher Education Area.

1. Relevant UNESCO Education Events (Feb-Nov 2025)

Below is a selection of events organized in 2025 in the field of higher education and recognition:

- **Strengthening International Higher Education Cooperation for Sustainability.** On 29 April in Paris, UNESCO IESALC convened the event “*Strengthening International Higher Education Cooperation for Sustainability*,” which brought together key stakeholders to exchange perspectives and promote collaborative approaches to advancing sustainability in higher education. Participants discussed innovative strategies, shared good practices, and explored ways to reinforce international cooperation to support sustainable development goals across higher education systems worldwide.
- **G20 Education Working Group.** In 2025, under South Africa’s presidency, the G20 Education Working Group placed strong emphasis on mutual recognition of qualifications and the development of skills relevant to a rapidly changing global context. The agenda focused on advancing mechanisms that facilitate academic and professional mobility, improving the transparency and comparability of qualifications, and strengthening partnerships to support lifelong learning and employability. The final statement recognized the importance of the Global and regional recognition conventions and called on countries to ratify them. UNESCO served as a key knowledge partner, providing technical expertise and evidence-based policy guidance, particularly drawing on its work in higher education cooperation, recognition conventions and skills development frameworks.
- **UNESCO General Conference - Side Event.** On 4 November, during the 43rd Session of the UNESCO General Conference held in Samarkand, the Government of Uzbekistan organized a side-event dedicated to the Global Convention on Higher Education. The session underscored Uzbekistan’s formal commitment to (and forthcoming ratification of) the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education and provided a platform for dialogue among Member States, national recognition bodies and higher-education stakeholders.
- **Right to Education Symposium:** On 9 December, UNESCO is holding a *Right to Education Symposium*, featuring a dedicated segment on higher education that examines higher education as a space of intersecting human rights laid out in a robust set of mutually reinforcing normative instruments and frameworks. In addition to examining rights *to* higher education the session will discuss the extensive rights and legal frameworks that specify *how* higher education should be undertaken. The panel will discuss academic freedom, drawing on the work of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education and examining its linkage with institutional autonomy as framed in the 1997 UNESCO Recommendation on the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel. The panel will also take up the rights of scientific

researchers, including aspects related to the right to benefit from scientific progress and current efforts in the area of Open Science. In addition, the panel will examine rights related to the recognition of qualifications and the assurance of quality higher education, as advanced through the Global Convention on Higher Education and the regional recognition instruments. Finally, it will reflect on the right to higher education as set out in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and discuss ongoing initiatives supporting its effective implementation.

2. Global and regional conventions on Higher Education

Thirty-nine (39) countries have now ratified the [Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education](#) which entered into force in 2023, with Uzbekistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Korea being the latest to join. This represents nearly one-third of the world's 7.3 million internationally mobile students according to the most recent data. Some 20 other countries are in the process of ratifying either the Global or the respective regional Convention or both.

The second session of the Intergovernmental Conference of the States Parties to the Global Convention on Higher Education was convened at UNESCO Headquarters (Paris, France) on 24 and 25 June 2025. Some 270 participants were in attendance, including representatives of 37 States Parties to the Convention. Observers included 60 UNESCO Member States, 25 organizations and the four presidents/representatives of the regional recognition convention committees.

The Conference marked some important key milestones for the development of the Convention, notably the adoption of the [Operational Guidelines](#) for the Convention, which are available in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish. The Committee also elected a new Bureau and adopted the [work plan for the 2025-2027 period](#), which notably includes the development of three new texts for adopted in 2027. These include new guidelines for States parties on:

- The relationship between the Global and regional conventions
- Quality assurance, including transnational education
- The recognition of the qualifications of refugees and displaced persons

In the margins of the Conference, UNESCO organized a side event on micro-credentials to explore this important emerging area. In addition, on 23 June 2025, UNESCO brought together the presidents/representatives of the four regional convention committees and networks of national implementation structures, and the chairperson of the Intergovernmental Conference, to share developments, priorities and chart the way forward for further cooperation between the Global and regional conventions.

Capacity-building webinars on the Global Convention on Higher Education

In line with the newly adopted work program, UNESCO is organizing a series of webinars to build capacity and accelerate the ratification and implementation of UNESCO's recognition conventions. These webinars target higher education officials, admissions officers, policymakers, credential evaluators, and national implementation centers, aiming to engage a community of practice and relevant stakeholders in the recognition landscape.

The first two webinars focused on "Unpacking national benefits of the Global Convention on Higher Education" and "Putting the Global Convention on Higher Education into practice." The final webinar for 2025 provided insights into the role of higher education institutions.

So far, participation and engagement have been strong, with an average of around 300 participants

joining from all over the world. The capacity-building webinars will continue in 2026.

Regional recognition conventions

The [Tenth Session of the Committee](#) of the **Lisbon Recognition Convention** met on 22 October in Paris, hosted by UNESCO. A key outcome of the meeting was the adoption of the revised [Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education \(TNE\)](#). The updated Code takes into account the rapidly evolving higher education landscape and introduces strengthened provisions on the quality assurance of cross-border provision, institutional responsibility in complex TNE arrangements, the protection of learners from fraud and malpractice, and the fair recognition of qualifications earned through TNE. Other major achievements included the approval of the updated [ENIC/NARIC Charter of Activities and Services](#) the endorsement of the Bureau's 2025–2028 work plan, and the election of a new Bureau.

The [Sixth Session](#) of the **Tokyo Convention** Committee was organized in conjunction with the Fifth APNNIC Plenary and the Nineteenth Session of the Bangkok Convention Committee in Bangkok, Thailand from 17 to 19 November 2025. The outputs from the meeting included the issuing of a Statement by the Tokyo Convention Committee, the updated Roadmap to 2030 and the updated APNNIC action plan to 2030.

The [Third Session](#) of the **Addis Convention** Committee will meet on 17 and 18 December in Marrakech. Notably during this meeting, delegates are expected to adopt the new Charter for the African Network of Implementation Structures and the Guidelines for the Establishment of National Implementation Structures, and a new work plan to help strengthen the Network in the coming biennium.

The **Buenos Aires Convention** Committee will meet in February 2026. In the meantime, the Network of National Information Centres in Latin America and the Caribbean (CINALC) [Network](#) continues to strengthen its work in the region.

3. Other Key Initiatives

Campus Africa Flagship: The Campus Africa Flagship, launched in 2022 as part of UNESCO's Operational Strategy for Priority Africa 2022-2029, aims to support more inclusive, quality-assured, equitable and gender-responsive higher education systems in Africa. Campus Africa has moved from design to delivery, entering a full implementation and scale-up phase in 2025. The flagship is now active across 50+ African countries, engaging 110 higher education institutions and the UNESCO Chairs UNITWIN networks, and a growing network of continental and regional bodies, development, higher education and university partners. Through Campus Africa over 25,000 students have benefited from high-impact solutions in higher technical education, digital skills, and sectoral innovation. Under its three pillars—research and innovation, doctoral education, and higher technical education/TVET—the programme supported 13 major capacity-strengthening activities in 2025, ranging from short workshops to multi-module programmes over several months. These activities involved 438 academic leaders and faculty and 500+ students from 30 African countries, with delivery led by UNESCO in partnership with AAU, SARUA, IAU, and others.

The **UNESCO-China Funds-in-Trust Phase III** project promotes youth employability by enhancing the quality and relevance of technical higher education in Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Gabon, Senegal, Tanzania and Uganda. Since 2021, partner universities of the project have completed labour market analyses and student tracer studies, launched competency-based curriculum reforms, and developed new programmes tailored to labour market demands and skills forecasts. Over 1600 educational staff have received training in competency-based pedagogy.

4. Looking ahead for 2026

In 2026, UNESCO will be working on the revision process of the **1997 UNESCO Recommendation Concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel**, approved at the UNESCO General Conference in November 2025. An Independent Expert Group will be established to assist in the revision process, and several thematic and regional consultations will be conducted to ensure an inclusive approach. Proposed consultation topics include, but are not limited to: 1) higher education teaching personnel in emergencies and conflict affected settings, 2) digital transformation, 3) academic work, 4) academic freedom, and 5) institutional autonomy.

UNESCO will continue to build on the **2021 Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence** to develop guidelines and tools for implementation and ethical and responsible usage of AI systems. UNESCO will also undertake research on the social and economic benefits of the recognition of qualifications for mobile students and workers, with a focus on the specific gains from the ratification of the Global and Regional Recognition Conventions.

UNESCO convened the third [World Higher Education Conference](#) in Barcelona in 2022 as part of a once-a-decade process of multilateral policy dialogue, deliberation, and peer learning. With its focus on “Reinventing Higher Education”, the WHEC2022 mobilized a global process of collaborative agenda-setting and action for transforming higher education systems and institutions to unleash higher education’s transformative potential to contribute to social and human development. In early 2026 UNESCO will be publishing a finalized “roadmap” for higher education transformation, ***Transforming higher education: Global collaboration on visioning and action***, that is the latest iteration in collectively fashioning and realizing a forward-looking higher education agenda.